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Jahresbericht

über das

Königl. Dom-Gymnasium zu Magdeburg

von Ostern 1898 bis Ostern 1899,

erstattet von

dem Direktor

Dr. Friedrich Holzweißig.

Inhalt: Dryden als a Satirist von Oberlehrer Dr. R. Ruchenbäcker.



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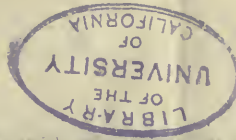
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Dryden as a Satirist.

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The greatest, or at least, one of the greatest satirical writers of the English nation is John Dryden.

He was born on the 9th of August 1631, at Aldwinckle All Saints, a village in Northamptonshire, and was the son of Mary and Erasmus Dryden, his mother being the daughter of the Rev. Henry Pickering. Both belonged to strong Puritan families, which had made themselves conspicuous for their opposition to the crown, and for the zealous consistency with which they had upheld the principles of their sect.

Of John Dryden's early youth little is known. If the inscription on the monument, erected by his cousin Mrs. Creed in Tichmarsh Church, is to be believed, he received the rudiments of his education somewhere in that village. From Tichmarsh he passed to West-

minster School, where he was educated as one of the King's Scholars by the famous Dr. Busby, a man who was destined to become the first of English schoolmasters, and a man for whom Dryden entertained the most sincere respect and veneration. Thirty years afterwards, when the Westminster boy had become the first poet and the first critic of his age, he addressed his old schoolmaster in some of the most beautiful verses he ever wrote. With exquisite taste he dedicated to him his translation of the Fifth Satire of Persius, in which this poet records his reverence and gratitude to Cornutus:

"Yet never could be worthily express'd
How deeply thou are seated in my breast.
When first my childish robe resigned the charge,
And left me unconfin'd to live at large.

Just at that age when manhood set me free,
I then deposed myself and left the reins to thee.
On thy wise bosom I repos'd my head,
And by my better Socrates was bred.
Then thy straight rule set virtue in my sight,
The crooked line reforming by the right.
My reason took the bent of thy command,
Was form'd and polish'd by the skilful hand"

From Westminster School young Dryden was elected to one of the Westminster scholarships at Cambridge, in 1650. Of Dryden's life and study at Cambridge Mr. Collins, in the Quarterly Review and in his Edition of Dryden's Satires, says: "Like Milton before him, and like Gray, Wordsworth, and Coleridge after him, he appears to have had no respect for his teachers, and to have taken his education into his own hands. From independence to rebellion is an easy step, and an entry may still be read in the Conclusion-book at Trinity, which charges him with disobedience to the Vice-Master and with contumacy in taking the punishment inflicted on him. That he studied hard, however, in his own way, is likely enough. He had, at all events, the credit at having read through the Greek and Roman authors. He taught himself Italian and French, and laid the foundation of those wide and varied, though perhaps superficial, attainments which he found so useful in after-life."

In January 1654, Dryden took the degree of Bachelor of Arts. In June of the same year his father died, and he left the University to take possession of his inheritance. Of his movements during the next three years nothing certain is known. About the middle of 1657 he went to London, where Oliver Cromwell was then in the zenith of his power, Dryden's cousin, Sir Gilbert Pickering, standing high in the Protector's favour. It is very probable that Dryden sought his cousin's patronage, and that he was, for a while, his private secretary, before he entered upon his literary career in good earnest.

In 1663, he married Lady Elizabeth Howard, sister of his friend Robert Howard, and eldest daughter of the Earl of Berkshire. This marriage was unhappy, there being apparently fault on both sides.

In 1668, the degree of Master of Arts was conferred on Dryden by the Archbishop of Canterbury, on a letter of recommendation from King Charles the Second; and two years later, he was made Poet Laureate and Historiographer Royal.

Soon after the accession of James the Second, Dryden became a Roman Catholic, and by this extraordinary step drew upon himself the ridicule of the most celebrated wits of the time. The Revolution deprived him of his offices of Poet Laureate and Historiographer Royal, his position becoming in consequence extremely lamentable. He had now nothing but his pen to depend on, and with this he endeavoured to earn his livelihood, until the end of his life in 1700.

He was buried in Westminster-Abbey, that

"Temple where the dead

Are honoured by the nation",

on a spot near the bones of Chaucer and Spenser, and not far from the graves of his friend Davenant, and his old Schoolmaster Dr. Busby.

The first memorable verses composed by Dryden were his Panegyric on the late Lord Protector Oliver Cromwell, published in 1658, and these were followed by his "Astraea Redux", in 1660, a poem written without any compunction to celebrate the return of the Saturnian age with Charles the Second.

After having written some other panegyrical pieces, Dryden began his career as a dramatic poet in the thirty-second year of his age. He wrote a great deal for the stage, but nothing that would have alone given him the high literary reputation that he now enjoys among his countrymen. It was by his satirical and didactic poems, as well as by his fables, that he achieved his proudest triumphs, all his former efforts compared with these poems sinking into insignificance.

The satirical works to which we must devote our attention are:

"Absalom and Achitophel", part the first,

"The Medal",

"Mac Flecknoe",

"Absalom and Achitophel", part the second,

and — although this last poem is written on an entirely different plan —

"The Hind and the Panther".

The contents of Dryden's satirical poems are, for a reader, at the present time, scarcely comprehensible without the help of a long commentary. They are built upon an historical basis, of which we must make the acquaintance, if we wish to appreciate them properly.

In 1660, Charles the Second, son of the unhappy Charles the First, had returned to his native country and was received with a pomp absolutely unknown. The whole

nation was in a state of hysterical excitement and of drunken joy, looking upon the return of Charles the Second as a return of peace, of law, and of freedom. But it was soon disappointed. The policy of the Stuart dynasty, acting upon the doctrine of Sir Robert Filmer who preached in his book entitled "Patriarcha, or the national power of Kings", the sovereign rights of the royal despotism and the passive obedience of the people, endeavoured to suppress all the religious and political liberty of England. On the other hand, the adversaries of this government, the Whigs, resisted that endeavour with great force, not even shrinking from the basest means in order to attain their ends. A furious party-spirit, though it did not exert itself in civil war and bloodshed, raged in full violence and broke out in falsehood, calumny, rancour, and fanaticism.

A wild chaos of religious and political parties, Presbyterians, Puritans and Roman Catholics on the one side, Tories and Whigs on the other — entangled in a continual quarrel which was carefully nursed by a shameful and corrupted ministry — was the inner state of England after the Restoration.

In October 1680, there passed the House of Commons a bill that became so famous later on under the name of Exclusion Bill.

King Charles the Second was childless, that is to say without a legitimate son, and the question of the succession was in consequence anxiously debated. After the King's death, Charles's brother, James, Duke of York, had the first claim to the throne, but he was a Catholic, and many thought that the Protestant religion would never be safe under a Catholic King. Every town, every county, every family was in excitement. Schoolboys even were divided into angry parties. In the midst of this great agitation, the Whigs put forward the Duke of Monmouth, as heir to the throne. Their leader was the Earl of Shaftesbury, who had formerly been president of the Privy Council of Thirty. He had been dismissed from his post in 1679, for having mortally offended the Duke of York, and it was chiefly by his exertions that the Exclusion Bill triumphantly passed the House of Commons. It reached the House of Lords, to which the whole nation now looked with the greatest anxiety. After a long, earnest, and occasionally furious debate, the bill was rejected by a great majority.

There has probably never been a more worthless controversy than that which at this time divided the English nation. But its very worthlessness afforded the most abundant and appropriate materials for satire, into which Dryden, who had already suffered much from the envy, insolence and even violence of his contemporaries, plunged, in 1681, with the whole force and fervour of his genius. In November of this year appeared the first part of "Absalom and Achitophel". This political satire is written in the style of a scriptural story, the names and situations of the personages being taken from the Bible, and connected together by a rather slender and unimportant thread of narrative.

Absalom is James, Duke of Monmouth, Achitophel is Anthony Ashley Cooper, Earl of Shaftesbury. It is said that this poem was written at the suggestion of Charles the

Second himself, who seems to have thought that the eloquence of Dryden might with advantage be employed to inflame the nation against the Opposition.

David, seated on the throne of Israel, is King Charles the Second; Michal, David's legitimate wife remaining childless like Catherine the Queen.

Dryden really does Charles a great deal of honour in representing him as David; and the reader is greatly surprised to hear Charles, disguised under the mask of the King of Israel, being praised as:

"The faith's defender and mankind's delight,
Good, gracious, just, observant of the laws."

(Globe Edition, v. 318—319).

We have already stated that Charles had no legitimate son, and that the Whigs had proposed the Duke of Monmouth as heir apparent. The latter was an illegitimate son of Charles the Second, and enjoyed the King's love in the same high degree as Absalom. By the politeness of his manners and the sweetness of his temper, he soon acquired great popularity not only among the nobles and ministers of state, but also among the majority of the people, and so much the more because he had, by several warlike enterprises, proved himself to be a gallant soldier and a good stratagist. In 1672 and 1673, Monmouth commanded the British troops sent to act with the French forces against Holland, and here he won great fame by his bravery at the siege of Maastricht. When, some years afterwards, the British auxiliaries were acting with the Dutch against the French, Monmouth again fought courageously at the head of the troops in the battle of St. Denis, August 1678. On his return from the Continent, he was received with enthusiasm by the whole nation, and he became forthwith the most popular man in the kingdom. His illegitimate birth was soon forgotten, and he was now generally regarded as the champion of the true religion and the rightful heir to the British throne. The interest which the populace took in Monmouth was kept up by every artifice. And some chiefs of the opposition, with the Earl of Shaftesbury at their head, urgently pressed him to embrace the opportunity of usurping the right of succession on his father's death. We have already observed the success of this bold enterprise.

Such then are the historical facts, which Dryden made use of in his satirical poem of *Absalom and Achitophel*. This poem exposing the base machinations of the seditious party and their chief, undoubtedly contributed to a considerable extent to the victory which King Charles the Second won over the "Exclusionists"; but on the other hand, Dryden cannot be acquitted of the charge of exaggeration, both in painting the baseness of the conspirators, and in endeavouring to represent Monmouth as only led away by the intrigues of selfish counsellors. Dryden had a great interest in treating the Duke in a manner which he knew would please the King. History tells us that Monmouth was not only led astray by the machinations of Shaftesbury, but that the increase of his

ambition was also to be ascribed to the unbounded love and indulgence which the King bore to this young favourite. Thus the latter began by degrees to regard himself as a legitimate offspring of the royal family. "Nothing was withheld from him", says Macaulay, "but the crown; nor did even the crown seem to be absolutely beyond his reach. The distinction which had most injudiciously been made between him and the highest nobles has produced evil consequences. When a boy he had been invited to put on his hat in the presence chamber, while Howards and Seymours stood uncovered round him. When foreign princes died, he had mourned for them in the long purple cloak, which no other subject, except the Duke of York and Prince Rupert, was permitted to wear. It was natural that these things should lead him to regard himself as a legitimate prince of the House of Stuart" (History of England, p. 247).

Dryden is undoubtedly too partial to Monmouth, on account of his personal obligations, not only to the King, but still more to the Duchess of Monmouth; for the latter had been one of his earliest, truest, and most zealous friends. Therefore, we cannot entirely assent to his vindication of Monmouth's character:

"'Tis juster to lament him than accuse". (v. 486).

As to Dryden's description of the rancours of the opposition and the leading members of the Whig-party, it is easy to imagine that we cannot always expect an unbiassed treatment from a man whose judgment was so much influenced by party-spirit. The Earl of Shaftesbury, it is true, was a man of an intriguing and selfish nature, but he was never such a monster of baseness and dishonesty as Achitophel, under whose name he is introduced. We may here again refer to Macaulay, who, though himself a member to the Whig-party, gives an impartial account of Shaftesbury's character. He says in his History: "Ashley (that is Anthony Ashley Cooper, Earl of Shaftesbury) with a far stronger head, and with a far fiercer and more earnest ambition (than the Duke of Buckingham whom he has just spoken of), had been equally versatile. But Ashley's versatility was the effect, not of levity, but of deliberate selfishness. He had served and betrayed a succession of governments. But he had timed all his treacheries so well, through all revolutions, his fortunes had constantly been rising" (History of England, p. 210). This judgment is a hard one, but it is mild, when compared with that which Dryden passed on Shaftesbury's character in "Absalom and Achitophel":

"Of these the false Achitophel was first,
A name to all succeeding ages curst:
For close designs, and crooked counsels fit,
Sagacious, bold, and turbulent of wit,
Restless, unfixed in principles and place,
In power unpleased, impatient of disgrace;
A fiery soul, which working out its way,
Fretted the pigmy body to decay

And o'er-informed the tenement of clay.
 A daring pilot in extremity,
 Pleased with the danger, when the waves went high,
 He sought the storms; but, for a calm unfit,
 Would steer too nigh the sands to boast his wit".

(v. 150—162.)

Dryden, moreover, charges Shaftesbury with having taken part in the invention of the chimerical Popish Plot, a conspiracy which, according to rumour, was being prepared against the Church and the constitution of England. But this charge, imputed to Shaftesbury, is nothing but a slanderous invention, for Shaftesbury prosecuted the discoveries of the Popish Plot with all the ardour of his vehement nature.

The most objectionable and ribald attack made by Dryden on Shaftesbury, however, is that through the contemptuous illusion to the bodily infirmities of his son, whom he calls an "unfeathered two-legged thing and a shapeless lump". (v. 170, 172). A poet ought never to descend to such gross personalities. very

During the war against Holland, in 1673, Dryden himself, in an epilogue to his tragedy of "Amboyna", endeavoured to inflame the national feeling against Holland by advocating an alliance of the kings of England and France against the Dutch. Here he says:

"Yet is their empire no true growth, but humour
 And only two Kings' touch can cure the tumour". (v. 17—18).

And Dryden concluded the same epilogue with a reference to the words "Delenda est Carthago" that Shaftesbury had spoken in Parliament in 1673:

"All loyal English will, like him, conclude
 Let Caesar live, and Carthage be subdued".

Nevertheless, Dryden attacks Shaftesbury a few years afterwards for taking part in the same deed, which he had once praised so enthusiastically, for he declares:

... "the triple bond he broke
 The pillars of the public safety shook,
 And fitted Israel for a foreign yoke." (v. 175—177.)

After all this, it is strange and remarkable that the second edition of "Absalom and Achitophel" contains a few lines in which Shaftesbury is highly praised as a judge:

"Yet fame deserved no enemy can grudge;
 The statesman we abhor, but praise the judge.
 In Israel's courts never sat an Abbethdin*)
 With more discerning eyes or hands more clean,
 Unbribed, unsought, the wretched to redress,
 Swift of despatch and easy of access". (v. 186—191.)

*) Abbethdin was president of the Jewish judicature (Christie, p. 97).

It is difficult to understand why Dryden should have inserted these lines of strong praise; but whatever may have induced him to make this addition, it shows that Shaftesbury's only fault was restless and unscrupulous ambition and that he cannot have been such a monster of impudence as Dryden represents him.

Others of the party of Monmouth or rather of the opposition party were stigmatized with a severity only inferior to that applied to Achitophel. Among these, one especially deserves our attention; and that is the Duke of Buckingham, represented as Zimri. George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham, was one of the five ministers known in 1671 by the appellation of the Cabal, a word formed from the initial letters of their names Clifford, Arlington, Buckingham, Ashley, and Landerdale. Buckingham had, together with Samuel Butler, the author of *Hudibras*, Thomas Sprat, and Martin Clifford, caricatured Dryden, and ridiculed his heroic rhymed plays in a farce called "The Rehearsal". The main figure is Bayes, none other than Dryden himself. His personal peculiarities and manners, his dress even, his habitual phrases, and customary exclamations were faithfully imitated. "The Rehearsal" had immense success, and Bayes was ever afterwards Dryden's nickname. Dryden, who later on showed so much irritation and impetuosity under attacks, made no immediate reply to Buckingham: on the contrary, he admitted that the *Rehearsal* was full of many a good hit. But though he endeavoured to show great indifference, he did not forget having been publicly ridiculed. When, however, he took his revenge, he treated Buckingham with mercy rather than with the severity due to the meanness of his character, such as history has represented him to be.

Of the Tory chiefs, who, in the language of the poem, retained their friendship for David at the expense of the popular hatred, Dryden presents the aged Duke of Ormond to us under the name of Barzillai (v. 818). This nobleman is panegyrised with a beautiful apostrophe to the memory of his eldest son, the Earl of Ossory (v. 831—863). In addition John Sheffield, Earl of Mulgrave, afterwards Marquis of Normandy, is represented as Adriel (v. 877); he was a poet and an especial friend of Dryden, and is said to have composed the *Essay on Satire*, attributed to Dryden. The two celebrated statesmen Halifax, and Lawrence Hyde, second son of the Lord Chancellor Clarendon, appear also in the list, under the names of Jotham (v. 882) and Hushai (v. 888).

The poem of "Absalom and Achitophel" was with all its faults a masterpiece, and it at once placed Dryden far above his poetical contemporaries.

Setting aside the political tendency and the various violent attacks showered on his adversaries, we cannot but admit that the poem is a splendid piece of poetry; and everybody must acknowledge the beauty, if not the justice, of the satire. Correct rhyme, harmony of versification, masculine energy of language, all these beauties, with which the poem abounds, had hitherto been unknown in English satirical poetry. The unrivalled portraits of Achitophel and Zimri, the speech of Achitophel, when tempting his faltering disciple, young Absalom, to conspire against King David, are passages full of lofty

poetry almost unparalleled in English literature. They are now-a-days declaimed by schoolboys who rejoice at the music and harmony of the lines, but who know little about the exasperating political struggles on the Popish Plot, and about the political career of Shaftesbury and Buckingham.

The success of this bold political satire was almost unprecedented. It was hailed by one side with the greatest enthusiasm and became at once immensely popular: its sale being for those days enormous.

But on the other hand, the Whig-party did not submit to these attacks with patience and forbearance, and many replies to "Absalom and Achitophel" were soon published. One of the first was a poem written by the Duke of Buckingham under the title: "Poetic Reflections on a late poem entitled Absalom und Achitophel". Samuel Pordage too, an inferior dramatic writer, published a counter-allegory bearing the title: "Azaria and Hushai"; and Elkanah Settle, a former enemy, published a poem entitled "Absalom Senior, or Achitophel Transposed". But all these replies have deservedly sunk into oblivion.

"Absalom and Achitophel", great as was its success, failed in its main purpose. Shaftesbury had been indicted for high treason, arrested, and committed to the Tower; and there is no doubt that Dryden wrote and published his satire in order to increase the public feeling against the Whig leader on the eve of his trial, and to cause the grand jury to pass sentence of death upon him. But the poem was not crowned with the success which the King's friends had expected. The grand jury threw out the bill of high treason, November 24th, 1681; and Shaftesbury was acquitted and set at liberty. The people in and around the court testified their joy by the loudest possible acclamations, and these acclamations were echoed throughout the city.

To celebrate their victory the Whigs struck a medal bearing on one side the head and name of Shaftesbury. On the reverse was represented a sun, obscured by a cloud, rising over the Tower and the City of London: the date of the rejection of the bill, and the motto "Laetamur" being likewise on this side. Impressions of this medal were distributed among the Whigs, and much to the chagrin of the Tories, all good Whigs took care to wear the ornament ostentatiously displayed on their breasts.

The Tories, baffled and angry, did not know what course to pursue. In this perplexity, the King himself is said to have appealed to his Laureate to bring into play once more those weapons of invective and ridicule, which he had already wielded with such signal success.

Thereupon Dryden wrote "The Medal, a Satire against Sedition", which was published in March, 1682, with the appropriate motto:

"Per Graium populos mediaeque per Elidis urbem
Ibat ovans divumque sibi poscebat honorem".

This poem is much shorter and much graver than "Absalom and Achitophel", extending to little more than 300 lines, and containing none of the picturesque personalities which had adorned its predecessor.

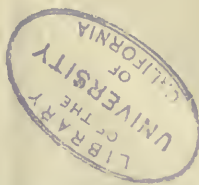
The medal, struck in honour of Shaftesbury's acquittal, is called the "Polish Medal" (v. 3), by which Dryden intended to throw further ridicule upon that politician's name. The poem refers to a rumour, then running through England, that Shaftesbury aspired to the crown of Poland, when John Sobiesky was elected in 1674. Whether this reproach was a just one we may leave undiscussed, but certainly such a rumour was welcome to Dryden, for it enabled him to cast ridicule upon Shaftesbury, rendering him at the same time contemptible for his political rancours. We find in this satire too several exaggerations, caused by personal hatred and political bitterness. Shaftesbury, as we have already mentioned, was unscrupulous about the means he used to attain his ends, but the insinuation made about him of 'bartering his venal wit for sums of gold' (v. 32) is entirely without foundation. On the contrary, there are proofs extant from impartial contemporaries, stating that Shaftesbury, among whose many faults corruptibility cannot be reckoned, while a member of the Council of State, never received any salary. Nor is there any truth in the imputation of "casting himself into the saint-like mould" (v. 33), because he was a member of Barebone's parliament. This was an assembly, which pretended to high sanctity and which Oliver Cromwell had denominated his council. Among the men of this assembly, was a man named Barebone, much noted for his long prayers, sermons, and harangues, and from this member, the populace nicknamed the assembly "Barebone's Parliament". It is true that in this Parliament Shaftesbury was an active member of a numerous moderate party, which ultimately prevailed over the fanatics; but the insinuation that Shaftesbury's "lewdness" (v. 37) was the cause of his separation from the saints, is equally devoid of foundation.

We see that Dryden again boldly throws out accusations, which, although without any proof, were nevertheless welcome for the purpose of painting Shaftesbury in colours as black as possible.

The minds of men, in those days, appeared so much soured with that pernicious spirit of passion and prejudice, that there was one kind of sophistry practised largely by both sides, and this was, to take any scandalous story that had ever been whispered about, or invented by the restless ambition of rancorous politicians, for an undoubted truth, and to make further suitable speculations on it. Such was also Dryden's practice, and it is a pity that an author so highly gifted should often allow himself to stoop to deeds of such a mean character.

In the lines 65 and 66 Dryden once more denounced Shaftesbury for his policy in the continental wars:

"Thus framed for ill, he loved our triple hold,
(Adrice unsafe, precipitous, and bold)".



When speaking of "Absalom and Achitophel" we have already mentioned this reproach, which contrasts so much with his former eulogies on the same matter.

Besides Shaftesbury, there are two other persons, members of the Whig-party, whom Dryden most undeservedly attacked: Thomas Pilkington and Samuel Shute. These two sheriffs of London are called by Dryden "gouty hands" (v. 182) hindering the head from executing its designs. This head was Sir John Moore, a Tory, who had been elected Lord Mayor, and who was a zealous supporter of the court. Pilkington, who was a very violent man, is said to have broken out in these terms, when it was first reported that the Duke of York intended to leave Scotland: "He has already burned the city; and is he now coming to cut all our throats?" (Hume, History, vol. VIII, p. 177).

The language of "the Medal" is vigorous, its versification less lively than that of "Absalom and Achitophel", but not less carefully written.

It was, of course, not to be expected that so undisguised an outburst of political wrath should be quietly received by the other side; so much the more, as the epistle to the Whigs prefixed to the poem, was a direct challenge, which could not remain unanswered. Many replies came forth from new and from old antagonists. We will only mention "the Medal Reversed" by Pordage, and "the Medal of John Bayes" by Shadwell. The latter was of the greatest importance. The author reproaches Dryden with all sorts of disgraceful conduct and unfortunate experiences. The attack passed all bounds of decency, especially as Dryden had not provoked Shadwell by any personal offence. They had formerly been friends, they had in conjunction with Crowne written a severe criticism on the "Empress of Marocco", a very dissolute play, composed by Elkanah Settle in 1673; and Dryden had furthermore written a prologue for Shadwell's play "The True Widow." But their friendship turned into political antagonism, when they were engaged on opposite sides in the fierce struggles between the Whigs and Tories.

While Dryden took but little notice of all the other attacks, he was yet so incensed by that of Shadwell, that he sat down to write an immediate reply. In October 1682, his new satirical poem was published under the title of "Mac Flecknoe, or a Satire on the True Blue Protestant Poet". Blue was the colour of the badge assumed by the Tories or Church Party. These called their adversaries True Blues, because the latter were not satisfied with being Protestants merely, as the churchmen were, but must be true Protestants, implying the others to be false ones, and not quite Papists (Collins, p. 127).

Shadwell was not insignificant as a dramatist. He had endeavoured to follow the principles of Ben Jonson, and he had a happy knack of detecting or imaging the oddities which, after Ben's example, he called "humours". Yet he is now only known as the hero of "Mac Flecknoe". When reading this poem, we must acknowledge that there are fewer exaggerations and intentional perversions of historical facts than in the two satires already mentioned.

Dryden, it is true, severely treats Shadwell, but his rude provocation did not deserve less severe treatment. Flecknoe, a poet who had died in 1678, is represented as the king of the realm of "Nonsense", and as a person who had arrived at the highest perfection of stupidity and dulness, and who had initiated his son and heir into the same mysteries. This son is Shadwell, who therefore bears the name of Mac Flecknoe; Mac signifying "son" in the Celtic language.

Flecknoe was an Irish priest and insignificant poet, whose name would scarcely have been handed down to posterity, had he not been mentioned by Dryden in this satire.

This king "through all the realms of Nonsense absolute" (v. 6) has grown old and is "worn out with business" (v. 9) and therefore resolves to surrender the care of the realm to his son Shadwell, whom, of all his numerous progeny, he thought to be the most fit "to reign and wage immortal war with wit" (v. 12).

Richard Flecknoe seems to have been a person ridiculous rather as a poet than contemptible as a man. Nor is it known that Flecknoe, while alive, had given Dryden any offence: but it is certain that his "Epigrams", published in 1670, contain some lines addressed to Dryden of a most complimentary character, beginning: "Dryden the Muses' darling and delight" (Christie, p. 142).

Therefore, in our opinion, Dryden has treated the latter too severely, although he only presents him as an accessory person, the main force of the satire being concentrated upon Shadwell. But more especially must we censure Dryden for his too severe treatment of Flecknoe, because the latter had died not long before and was no longer able to defend himself. Dryden then alludes in his satire to Shadwell's plays; but "Psyche", "the Miser" and the "Humorists" are plays of Shadwell's which are, by no means, so insipid and stale as the censure of Dryden represents them to be. There Shadwell is charged with having pilfered from the works of Sir George Etherege, presented under the name of Gentle George, a light poet of the Restoration, who wrote very popular comedies full of spirit and wit. This accusation although without foundation is not an invention of Dryden's, but was often repeated at that time.

Dryden further ridicules Shadwell's pretensions to copy Ben Jonson in the following lines:

"Nor let false friends seduce thy mind to fame
By arrogating Jonson's hostile name;
Let father Flecknoe fire thy mind with praise
And uncle Ogleby*) thy envy raise
Thou art my blood where Jonson has no part:
What share have we in nature or in art?
Where did his wit on learning fix a brand
And rail at arts he did not understand?" (v. 171—178).

*) Ogleby, originally a dancing-master, translated Homer, Virgil and Aesop, and was the author of other poems and of a History of China. (Christie p. 147).

The author's criticism on Shadwell's plays was both unsparing and crushing:

"Thy tragic muse gives smiles, thy comic sleeps" (v. 198)

and when he asserts:

"With whatever gall thou setst thyself to write,

Thy inoffensive satires never bite" (v. 199—200),

we cannot help doubting that these words come from the poet's heart.

Though Dryden's revenge was extremely successful, he yet had the mortification afterwards of seeing Shadwell promoted to the office of Poet Laureate, when, after the accession of William the Third to the throne, he was deprived of the laureateship as well as of the office of Historiographer Royal.

With respect to the literary part of "Mac Flecknoe", we can only say that it deserves full praise. It differs from the others which Dryden published at that time being rather a literary satire, although it was provoked by political and personal struggles alone. Dryden applies a worthy, lofty and elevated style not to subjects deserving such emphatical language, but to subjects of insignificant importance, in order to increase, by such a contrast, the ridicule on the persons who are attacked.

Just a month after the publication of Mac Flecknoe appeared a second part of "Absalom and Achitophel". The greater part of this poem, which is more than 1100 lines long, is composed by the poet Nahum Tate, a strong Tory, who translated the Psalms into verse, and who became Poet Laureate on the death of Shadwell. Dryden only contributed about two hundred lines, but he carefully revised the whole, and improved parts of Tate's work. His contribution begins with the lines: "Next these, a troop of busy spirit press" (v. 310) and ends: "To talk like Doeg, and to write like thee". (v. 509).

It is chiefly his share of the poem to which we must pay attention. Without any great difficulty an attentive reader will feel the passionate irritation, which distinguishes the language of the great satirist from that of his fellow-writer.

Dryden, after having disposed of Ferguson, Forbes, Johnson, Pordage, and other adherents of the Whig party with a curt indifference, which stings on account of its contemptuous brevity, once more concentrates the main-force of his satire upon Shadwell and Elkanah Settle, the author of the "Empress of Marocco", a drama which had provoked, as we have seen, a severe criticism written by Dryden in conjunction with Shadwell and Crowne. These passages are unparalleled for invective; and it was poured forth in an unstinted fashion upon the heads of his poetical adversaries. In English literature, nay, in the literature of all civilized nations, there is scarcely any passage, where a poet's personal enmity so much surpasses the limits of poetical and literary controversy as here. Shadwell and Settle are introduced under the names of Og and Doeg with the following words:

"Two fools that crutch their feeble sense on verse

Who by my Muse to all succeeding times

Shall live in spite of their own dogrel rhymes." (v. 409—411).

For these lines, though very severe, nobody will blame the poet; but soon all reflection and moderation are carried away by the extreme passion and bitterness of his heart. It is with loathing that we read the following lines:

"Let him (Settle) be gallows free by my consent,
And nothing suffer, since he nothing meant;
Hanging supposes human soul and reason,
This animal's below committing treason" (v. 431—435).

For this base onslaught there is no excuse whatever. But when turning to Shadwell, his calumny grows even worse. Not satisfied with having successfully ridiculed him as a poet, he denounces him as a drunkard and profligate:

"Og from a treason-tavern rolling home
Round as a globe, and liquored every chink," (v. 458—459)
and further: "For every inch that is not fool is rogue:
A monstrous mass of foul corrupted matter." (v. 463—464).

Shadwell had made no reply to "the Medal", and Dryden, therefore, had no reason for assailing him again in a manner so utterly unworthy of a poet. Having dealt with both these victims, this part of the poem concludes with some contemptuous lines on the character of their poetry. I cannot myself help thinking that there is always lurking at the bottom of these side-blows, the poet's extreme jealousy of all those who dared to be his literary competitors. Whenever he has finished off a political adversary, who is of the same time a poet, he never fails to deal a few side-blows on his literary occupation; or, to speak more precisely, he pretends to strike only an indirect blow. In his inner heart, however, he is much more irritated by their writing poems and plays like himself, than by their political opposition. To men of letters who could not be expected to rise to such a height that they were likely to become his rivals, he was not merely just, but even, as is generally acknowledged, often a friend and benefactor. But to every writer who rose above mediocrity, and came near his own level, he became an enemy, either opened or disguised. Polemics so grossly unjust, are far below the dignity of poetry; and even the Quarterly Reviewer, who, throughout his essay, shows himself too zealous an admirer of Dryden, cannot but acknowledge that in treating Shadwell he seems to descend to the level of the object he despises. (Qu. Rev. p. 316).

But on the other hand, it is incomprehensible how the same critic can bring himself to defend, nay even to praise the poet for the above mentioned verses on Settle, which, in his opinion, "unite in an equal degree poignant wit with boisterous humour, and are in every way worthy of his great powers." (Qu. Rev. p. 316).

These then were the four powerful satires with which Dryden standing in the middle of that exasperating political struggle, had struck such deadly blows on his political antagonists, the Whig-party. He had spread terror and destruction through the ranks of his adversaries, and finding no other opponent courageous enough to again challenge

the merciless weapons of so dangerous and unscrupulous an enemy, his satirical pen had rest for a while. For want of opponents it rested for ever, giving birth to no satire directly political. There is, however, one poem of Dryden's that is written, as has been already mentioned, on a plan entirely different from those four political or personal satires, but which notwithstanding deserves our attention here.

This poem, which is to be ranked among his brilliant productions, is "The Hind and the Panther".

It was written immediately after the poet's conversion to the Roman Catholic faith, with the intention of glorifying his newly adopted creed and of satirizing, at the same time, the innumerable sects opposed to the Popish Church. It is partly satirical, partly didactic, and may best be designated as a satirico-didactic allegory.

Politics and religion were, throughout that period of English history, closely connected, religious interests being mingled with all the political controversies of those days. There were then various religious sects, Presbyterians, Independents, Anabaptists, Socinians and Quakers, who setting aside the Church of Rome and the Church of England, persecuted each other with no less intolerance than the political parties did.

We will not enter here into the question so much debated on, whether Dryden's change of religion was sincere. Samuel Johnson, Sir Walter Scott, the Quarterly Reviewer (Mr. Collins) and Mr. Saintsbury on the one hand, have endeavoured to prove that it was sincere; but on the other hand, Lord Macaulay and Mr. Christie have called its sincerity into question.

Whatever may be said of it, the eloquent defence of the Church of England so warmly urged in "Religio Laici", published a few years before "the Hind and the Panther" exhibits too incomprehensible a contrast with this splendid eulogy on the Roman Church.

"The Hind and the Panther", which consists of three parts, appeared in 1687. In the preceding year Dryden had retired from London to a country-seat in Northamptonshire near Aldwinkle, his native place, where this poem was completed. The Hind, "milk-white, immortal and unchanged", although always under the peril of dying, is chosen to represent the Roman Church; the Panther, "sure the noblest next the Hind, and fairest creature of the spotted kind" (part I, v. 327) is the Church of England. The Hind is pursued by all the fierce beasts of the forest and the field; the bloody bear, the bristled boar, the insatiate wolf, false Reynard, the buffoon ape, all of them cast wild glances of wrath and furious enmity upon the innocent Hind. All these animals are types of the innumerable sects of the English Protestants: Independents, Anabaptists, Presbyterians, Socinians, and Free-thinkers. Only the timorous hare, the Quaker, thinks it best to observe a safe neutrality. Of all the denizens of the forest there is but one beast that is equally hated and persecuted and that is the Panther, representing the Church of England. The Hind comes down to a spring to drink, but fearing her enemies, who are likewise all assembled there for the same purpose, she does not approach, until the Lion, her friend and protector —

none other than King James the Second — summons her to come near. The crowd stands amazed at finding her, on a nearer view, quite a different animal from that which her enemies had endeavoured to depict her:

“Lord, how they all admired her heavenly hue”. (v. 543).

The likeness is easily understood. The Roman Catholic Church, up to that time, calumniated and hated for want of a better acquaintance, is now under the protection of King James the Second. She is thus able to display all her advantages, and can therefore afford her numerous adversaries an opportunity of judging how much she has hitherto been calumniated by the Presbyterians and other enemies.

When now the herd, having quenched its thirst, withdrew “to ferny heaths and to their forest lair”, (I, v. 555) the Hind and the Panther remain alone, and they at once enter into a long discussion about their common dangers, the controversies still to be settled between the two respective creeds, and similar religious topics then occupying public interest.

Having finished the second part, Dryden relapses in the 3rd part into personal satire, and alters the tone towards the Protestant dissenters, who were in sympathy with a change in James the Second’s policy.

In the beginning of his reign King James had endeavoured to effect a kind of alliance between the Catholic and Protestant Churches, in order to make common cause against all kinds of Dissenters. With respect to this policy of the King we may observe that throughout the first two parts of the “Hind and the Panther” the Protestant sects are all treated with disrespect and indignation, while the Church of England is treated with a feeling of mercy and compassion, rather than severity. But finding the Churchmen intractable, the King tried to conciliate the Dissenters, and issued that famous Declaration of Indulgence, suspending all the laws that had been executed with the greatest rigour against every class of Dissenters.

Dryden having retired from the scene of politics to the silence of Rushton in Northamptonshire, learned somewhat late the news of the King’s change of policy, but not too late for his industrious pen to correct the mistake he had made. He took care at once to diminish both his praises of the Protestants and his satires on the Nonconformists.

Two considerable passages were inserted: the story of the Swallows told by the Panther, and the Hind’s reply to this story, the fable of the Doves.

The story of the Swallows is one of the liveliest of all Dryden’s pieces of narration, and deserves full praise for its poetical diction. A few lines are worth quoting:

“New blossoms flourish and new flowers arise,
As God had been abroad, and walking there
Had left his footsteps and reformed the year.
The sunny hills from far were seen to glow
With glittering beams, and in the meads below
The burnished brooke appeared with liquid gold to flow”.

(III, v. 553—558).

From the ironical parable told by the Panther, the Hind observes how the former is disposed towards her; her patience therefore becomes exhausted, or — to drop the similitude — the King, when finding the Protestants too obstinate towards his intentions, changes his policy:

“The matron wooed her kindness to the last,
But could not win; her hour of grace was past.
Whom thus persisting when he could not bring
To leave the Wolf and to believe her King,
She gave her up, and fairly wished her joy
Of her late treaty with her new ally”. (III, v. 892—897).

In reply to the story of the Swallows, another satirical fable is told by the Hind: the Fable of the Doves.

James the Second is represented there as a plain good man “who inured to hardships from his early youth, took possession of his just estate”. Near the house in which he lived there were established “a sort of doves”, but these animals “who cross the proverb, and abound with gall” (v. 947) are unworthy of the love and indulgence which their master bears to them. These doves who abuse their owner’s kindness so much, are the clergy of the Church of England.

We see how much the obedient poet’s feelings had changed against the Protestants, just as his sovereign’s policy had done. Besides these doves, the same owner had behind his house another farm, wherein “his poor domestic poultry” representing the Roman Catholic priests were fed. These “pampered pigeons” beheld those with malignant eyes, but feeling too feeble to fight against them, they tried to make allies of their former enemies. After a grave consultation all agreed to request the assistance of the Buzzard, which he willingly grants. The owner, seeing his indulgence so grossly abused, interferes by a stratagem, which he thinks will best settle all quarrels. Finding that it was but a want of freedom that had hitherto made his fowls envious of one another, he issues a gracious edict granting liberty to all of them:

“He therefore makes all birds of every sect
Free of his farm, with promise to respect
Their several kinds alike, and equally protect”. (v. 1244—1246).

It is not difficult to understand that it is the Declaration of Indulgence, to which these lines of praise allude. We must acknowledge that Dryden cleverly understood how to amend the mistake which he had made, while the poem was in progress.

By the Buzzard is meant Gilbert Burnet, then residing in Holland; and having the confidence of the Prince of Orange, he was afterwards made Bishop of Salisbury. He was very celebrated at the same time as an extempore preacher, and known as the author of a very large number of theological and political writings. But notwithstanding his merits he was not free from the faults so frequent in those troublesome days. His extreme vanity

and the provoking audacity of his attacks often made him the target for mockery and hot controversy. Yet Burnet, although he deserved severe censure in many respects was by no means so full of rancour and deceitfulness as Dryden represents him to be in the rôle of the Buzzard.

Burnet repaid Dryden's satire by branding him in his *History of his Own Time* (folio-edition I, 269), published after his death in 1723, as a "monster of immodesty and of impurity of all sorts", a censure specially referring to Dryden's plays.

Another antagonist of Dryden's, named Stillingfleet, Bishop of Worcester, is but slightly mentioned in the third part of "the Hind and the Panther". Together with Tillotson and Burnet he was at the head of that school of divines, who were for widening the basis of the Church of England, and who were likewise desirous of admitting a large portion of the Dissenters into their community. A severe controversy between Dryden and Stillingfleet had passed before the publication of "the Hind and the Panther", and Dryden had been worsted through the wider experience of his opponent.

It is not a matter of wonder then that the appearance of "the Hind and the Panther" excited a great clamour against the author. His recent conversion had naturally increased the ire of his opponents, and given them much assistance for an attack upon him.

Of the many satirical replies which were published, that which most deeply affected Dryden was the joint production of two young men. Charles Montague, afterwards Earl of Halifax, and Matthew Prior wrote a burlesque together on Dryden's poem, under the title of "the Hind and the Panther transversed to the story of the Country Mouse and the City Mouse", in which Mr. Christie has discovered "true wit" and the Quarterly Reviewer "exquisite satire". (Qu. Rev. p. 323).

The old poet seems to have treated both Prior and Montague with great kindness, and he is said to have felt their ingratitude very keenly, and to have been moved to tears by their fable. But, whatever may be said against Dryden's poem of "the Hind and the Panther", it well deserves to be called a masterpiece both with regard to its light and easy versification, and to its splendid language, which is so rich in passages of sublimity and force. In this latter respect only the first part of "Absalom and Achitophel" is fit to be compared with "the Hind and the Panther". In brilliant language Dryden laments that his native country is being torn by the pernicious fury of religious fanaticism:

"Too boastful Britain, please thyself no more
That beasts of prey are banished from thy shore;
The Bear, the Boar, and every savage name,
Wild in effect, though in appearance tame,
Lay waste thy woods, destroy thy blissful bower,
And, muzzled though they seem, the mutes devour".

(part I, v. 154—159).

After the Revolution Dryden's influence and authority declined more and more. Deprived of his offices of Poet Laureate and Historiographer Royal, he retired from the battle-field of satire, where he had indeed won a great deal of glory, though he had experienced at the same time much more grief and mortification.

In the preceding pages we have endeavoured to give some outline of the historical events and personages reflected in Dryden's Satires; we have likewise attempted to prove how often the poet's satire is decidedly unjust, and how his fervid language is justified by the base machinations of his adversaries. On the other hand we have always done full justice to the poetical value of his satirical poems. From this latter point of view, we repeat, Dryden's satires fully deserve the praise always bestowed on them for their elegant diction, their easy versification and their clear and accomplished style, which often rises to pictures full of high poetical vigour and dignity. We have cited several passages illustrating these merits, passages which it would be easy to increase. This poetical merit has never been a matter of doubt. But however great an acknowledgment Dryden's satires deserve as pieces of poetry, our judgment cannot be the same, when we consider the true end of Satire.

Dryden himself remarks in the preface to "Absalom and Achitophel": "The true end of Satire is the amendment of vices by correction", but he did not compose his satires from this point of view. Thrown off in haste to serve the purposes of the day, they are always inspired by hatred against individuals; and they are dictated by furious party spirit, not by love of virtue. Therefore, they seldom rise above the level of literary and political pamphlets. None of his satires were written for mere literary fame. His restless and insatiate ambition made him the blind follower of the government, and caused him to wield his powerful pen either in polemical defence of his protector's interests, or in giving expression to personal spite and resentment. The occasional fierceness and even injustice of his satire cannot indeed be denied, nor even justified by the attacks — not always kept within the bounds of literary polemics — of his adversaries.

The circumstance that so much bitter invective was provoked by the fierce onslaughts of his antagonists, may explain, but not excuse, the poet's behaviour towards his personal enemies. He did not understand the art of hiding his feelings under the semblance of good humour or contempt. What he lacked, was self-domination, so necessary for a poet, and especially for a satirical poet. It is a pity therefore that a man so highly gifted could not restrain himself from wasting his powers in political strife and personal controversy. But it is just in their bold personality and their close connection with the religious and political quarrels, then agitating all minds, that is hidden the secret of the powerful effect of Dryden's satires on his contemporaries, and which makes the poet, as Mr. Taine calls it: "épiqueux et déplaisant pour un lecteur moderne, mais d'autant plus loué et aimé de son temps". (Histoire de la Littérature anglaise, livre III, chap. II, p. 234). And so it is indeed. Dryden's satires, though being exceedingly popular in those days

have almost entirely lost their interest for a modern reader, as they were written for merely temporary purposes.

In judging him as a satirist, we cannot therefore agree with the eulogies passed upon him by most of his countrymen. English Literature is indebted to him for splendid and manifold services, which have been generally acknowledged; "glorious Dryden" being regarded by the English with a kind of grateful piety. This piety often makes them blind to his faults. The first author who did not join in this paean of general praise was Lord Macaulay, who condemned the boldness of the personal invectives hidden in Dryden's satires. By the greater part of English critics his judgment has been decried as an unjust one, and it is only Mr. Christie, the learned editor of the Globe Edition, who sides with Macaulay.

The Quarterly Reviewer endeavours to refute Macaulay's charges (p. 293); but it is Mr. Saintsbury chiefly who makes an elaborate attempt to raise the poet as a satirist to a height which he does not, in our opinion, deserve to occupy.

We will attempt to refute some of the assertions of Mr. Saintsbury. He says, for instance: "There never was a satirist who less abused his power for personal ends. He only attacked Settle and Shadwell after both had assailed him in the most virulent and unprovoked fashion". (Engl. Men of Letters, p. 80).

Settle and Shadwell were by no means the only persons he attacks too severely; and as to the manner in which he attacks them we have already remarked that it was in the highest degree unworthy of any poet.

Nevertheless Mr. Saintsbury says, a few passages before the passage above cited: "Dryden on the other hand in the character of Og confines himself in the adroitest way to generalities". (p. 78). Furthermore the author thinks it a praise-worthy delicacy that Dryden abstained from taking his revenge on Rochester, although he had cause enough*: "But Dryden was far too manly to war with the dead". (p. 81).

We can easily supply Mr. Saintsbury with an example to the contrary: Why did this manly spirit not restrain Dryden from making Flecknoe (a poet who had been dead but a few years) the King of Nonsense, and from heaping ridicule on a man who was no longer able to defend himself?

Mr. Saintsbury also enters into the question of the true end of satire, and how Dryden has fulfilled the task of a satirist. And here again we are by no means able to agree with his opinion. It should be borne in mind that a satire, in order to deserve its purpose — the amendment of vices by correction — ought never to be directed against generally known individuals, for in this case it will never attain its object; on the contrary, it will only provoke a reply still more rudely personal and fierce. Such was the case

*) In December of the year 1679, Dryden was the victim of a savage and cowardly night attack in the neighbourhood of Covent Garden, of which the instigator is believed to have been the poet and profligate John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester. (Christie, p. XXXXI).

with Dryden and his antagonists. It is scarcely comprehensible that Mr. Saintsbury can undertake the task of defending Dryden from this reproach. But he does so, nay, he even asserts that the laureate's satires are the true kind of satires: "Most satirists are usually prone to the error of attacking either mere types, or else individuals too definitely marked as individuals. The first is the fault of R gnier and all the minor French satirists, the second is the fault of Pope. In the first case the point and zest of the thing are apt to be lost, and the satire becomes a declamation against vice and folly in the abstract. In the second case a suspicion of personal pique comes in, and it is felt that the requirement of art, the disengagement of the general law from the individual instance, is not sufficiently attended to. R gnier perhaps only in Macette, Pope perhaps only in Atticus, escape this Scylla and this Charybdis. But Dryden rarely or never falls into either's grasp" (Engl. Men of Letters, p. 77).

The incorrectness of this judgment wants no further proof. Are not Shaftesbury, his son so contemptuously alluded to, Shadwell, Settle and Burnet — a list which it would be easy to increase — are not all of them individuals, too definitely marked as individuals? Does Dryden not heap upon them calumnies which they never deserved?

If we compare the modern French satire founded by Mathurin R gnier, whom Mr. Saintsbury also alludes to, with those of Dryden and of England in general, we find the following fact: On the one hand, the great merit of having introduced into France the regular satire modelled upon that of Horace and Juvenal is due to R gnier and like his models he turns away from politics and only indulges in literary and social satire. With a piercing eye R gnier is able to discern the faults and follies of his countrymen, but in his heart he has a great love for them and it is with a kind of good-humoured irony that he censures the faults of his contemporaries. He never abuses his satire as a weapon for injured vanity or private spite.

Another example is Moli re, whose plays, although clothed in a dramatic form, are most of them nothing but satires on the follies and vices of his time. And such has been the character of French satire from its origin to the present day.

Dryden's satires, on the other hand, are full of private grudges and bitterness against his victims, without any warm feeling towards those of his fellow-creatures whose condition he intends to improve. But that is Dryden's great fault: his intention is not to make better a person, but only to take revenge and in this he has only too well succeeded. None of those adversaries who were bold enough to provoke his anger rose again from the deadly blows with which he struck them.

But notwithstanding, Mr. Saintsbury says: "It never does for the political satirist to love his temper and to rave and rant and denounce with the air of an inspired prophet. Dryden, and perhaps Dryden alone, has observed this rule. As I have just observed, his manner towards his subjects is that of a cool and not illhumoured scorn". (p. 76).

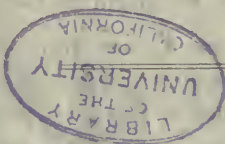
The result of our deduction must therefore be: As a satirist Dryden is over-rated by his countrymen.

If we ask what is the cause, it is in our opinion — in addition to the gratitude which the English are indebted to him as a literary reformer — to be found in the fact that English literature does not possess any true satirist; at least not any satirist fulfilling the above-stated task of satire. All the English satirical writers either take part in a political turmoil embittered by party-spirit, or they engage in rudely personal controversy. The first class has found its greatest representative in Jonathan Swift, the second in the hateful satire of Alexander Pope. From this point of view we understand how an Englishman can sum up his judgment on Dryden's satires in the words: "Not only is there nothing better of their own kind in English, but it may almost be said that there is nothing better in any other literary language". (Engl. Men of Letters, p. 71/72).

We cannot agree with such a judgment. Dryden would perhaps have been able to employ his strong original powers in a better way, if he had lived in a better age. We need not wonder that an author, with a highly sensitive and irritable temper, living in a turbulent time so full of shameless intrigues, profligacy, and selfish political dishonesty, plunged courageously into what was then considered as the battle-field of all the eminent spirits of the nation. When the minds of men are occupied to such a large extent by the violence of political and religious fanaticism, they will care little about the justice or injustice of the means which they employ. Such was the case with Dryden's antagonists, and we can conceive that such attacks often excited his temper, but we have already said that such an explanation is not able to excuse the poet. A really great poet must be above such base strife.

Our final judgment must therefore be:

John Dryden misapplied his great original talents by treating subjects unworthy of his ambition, and by qualifying his thirst for personal revenge.



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